



NOAA04-R453

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### **TRUSTEES ESTABLISH OYSTER RESTORATION SANCTUARY**

*Congressman Hoyer and Trustee Agencies celebrate seeding of ten million oysters*

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the State of Maryland will begin seeding 10 million oysters in a newly established oyster sanctuary. This restoration effort is one of several projects that address natural resource injuries from the April 2000 oil spill into the Patuxent River in southern Maryland.

The oyster restoration effort addresses injuries to fish and shellfish caused by a ruptured pipeline that spilled approximately 140,000 gallons of oil at the Potomac Electric Power Company (Pepco) Chalk Point generating facility in Aquasco, Md. Under the federal Oil Pollution Act, NOAA, USFWS, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Maryland Department of Environment are responsible for assessing and restoring natural resources injured by the spill.

"I am pleased to join NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Maryland as we take another step forward to repair the damage caused by the April 2000 Chalk Point oil spill and to restore the Patuxent River," said Congressman Steny Hoyer. "The important projects included in the restoration plan that were proposed two years ago such as the wetlands, habitats and recreational facilities, and the oyster sanctuary we are laying today, will have a long-term positive effect on our environment and our economy. I look forward to continuing as a partner in this effort to protect and conserve our treasured natural resources."

The trustee agencies, with the responsible parties, Pepco and ST Services, conducted a cooperative natural resource damage assessment to determine the nature and extent of injuries to resources and the restoration needed to reverse these losses. The spill oiled an estimated 80 acres of wetlands and shoreline, killing more than 1,000 birds and animals, including waterfowl, diamondback terrapins and muskrats. The spill also harmed fish and shellfish and hampered roughly 125,000 river trips by fishermen and recreational boaters.

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"Pepco worked closely with NOAA and co-trustees, and proved to be a role model for how industry can produce significant restoration outcomes while addressing pollution liability," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "It was only through this level of cooperation that we were able to efficiently redress the harm caused by oil spill."

"Through the establishment of this oyster sanctuary, we are creating and protecting critical habitat that benefits the natural resources of the Patuxent River *and* the local communities," said Tom McCabe, acting field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Chesapeake Bay Field Office. "Combined with acquiring ruddy duck habitat and restoring recreational activities, we are moving closer towards restoring the people and heritage of the Chesapeake Bay."

In addition to establishing and seeding the oyster sanctuary, the agencies are implementing the following restoration projects:

- Creating 5.7 acres of marsh and enhancing an acre of terrapin nesting habitat;
- Acquiring 1,800 acres of perpetual protective easements in the Prairie Pothole region to restore ruddy duck nesting habitat and increase the number of ducks returning to Maryland each year;
- Constructing two canoe/kayak paddle-in campsites, one in Prince George's County and one in St. Mary's County;
- Constructing a handicap accessible kayak/canoe launch site at Greenwell State Park in St. Mary's County;
- Enhancing recreational opportunities at Maxwell Hall Natural Resource Management Area in Charles County by building trails, benches and a boardwalk;
- Improving an existing boat ramp at Forest Landing in St. Mary's County;
- Building a fishing pier at Cedar Haven in Prince George's County;
- Rebuilding a boardwalk, improving boat access, and establishing a river education project at Kings Landing Park in Calvert County; and
- Adding a boat launch platform to an existing pier at Nan's Cove in Calvert County.

"This is a historic day for the Patuxent River and demonstrates how cooperative teamwork can positively impact a bad situation," said Maryland Department of Natural Resources Secretary C. Ronald Franks. "The oyster sanctuary, the new wetlands, the ruddy duck habitat, the recreational facilities-these projects will provide long-term benefits to the river and the watershed as a whole, ensuring future generations can enjoy the Chesapeake Bay's natural splendor."

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. NOAA and co-trustees act on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by oil spills and hazardous substance releases. NOAA – <http://www.noaa.gov>

For more information on the Patuxent River oil spill:  
[www.darp.noaa.gov/neregion/chalkpt.htm](http://www.darp.noaa.gov/neregion/chalkpt.htm).